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AMENDMENTS THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1. 1.   (Currently Amended) A method for supporting virtual path/virtual channel (VP/VC) groups in asynchronous transfer mode (ATM) switching systems that implement ATM automatic protection switching (APS) in which traffic flows from a source on two paths and a destination selects traffic from only one of the paths at a time for further processing, the method comprising:
   creating a groups table, the groups table having an entry for each of the two paths of every active VP/VC group, each active VP/VC group having an associated set of member circuits, each entry indicating whether the cells for that path of that VP/VC group should be forwarded or discarded, each entry referenced by means of a pointer field;
   accessing a relevant entry in the groups table when a cell arrives on one of the two paths, the relevant entry associated with the one of the two paths, the relevant entry including a status value; and
   discarding the cell if the status value is indicative of a discard status or forwarding the cell if the status value is not indicative of ~~a status other than~~ the discard status.

2. 2.   (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, wherein forwarding the cell comprises:
   maintaining a lookup table including a lookup table entry for each circuit in the set of member circuits of each VP/VC group for forwarding cells; and
   forwarding the cell as specified in the lookup table entry for that circuit.

3. 3.-4.   Cancelled

4. 5.   (Previously presented) The method of claim 2, wherein a number of supported groups is determined in part by a number of bits allocated to the pointer field associated with the circuit for the cell.

5. 6.   (Previously presented) The method of claim 1 wherein any value of the pointer field other than zero constitutes a valid index into the groups table.

6. 7.   (Previously presented) The method of claim 6, wherein a value of zero in the pointer field of the groups table indicates that the corresponding VC circuit or VP circuit is not a member of

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3   any of the VP/VC groups, and that a forward/discard status of the respective circuit is stored in a

4   lookup table entry associated with the circuit.

1   8.   (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the groups table is implemented

2   as part of a module of the switching system.

1   9.   (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, wherein a number of supported VP/VC

2   groups is determined in part by a size of the groups table.

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